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ABSTRACT

The 20th Arizona Indian Town Hall considered the issues of cultural and native language instruction for American Indian students and the impact of new state standards. Representatives of 17 tribes, state officials, educators, school board members, parents, and students participated. In the area of culture and language instruction, recommendations included tribes taking the lead in determining their communities' needs; tribes and the state jointly funding cultural and language instruction programs; granting waivers for tribal elders to teach culture and language courses; seeking accreditation for tribal language and culture courses; training and certifying all Arizona teachers in these areas; tribes and the state jointly crafting new state cultural and language standards and instructional models; more tribal members running for their local school boards; teaching children their native language in early childhood; utilizing language immersion programs for native language instruction; and providing scholarships to teachers for cultural competency training. Recommendations concerning Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) included delaying the AIMS graduation requirement until 2013 while tribes research the test's validity for Indian students; developing curricula that meet the new standards; lobbying Congress to increase funding for Bureau of Indian Affairs schools and programs; allowing local districts to determine how best to teach to the standards; tribes developing their own cultural standards; developing programs that give Indian students extra instruction needed to achieve the standards; teachers respecting parents and the role that extended families play in their students' education; developing teacher retention policies; and filling the position of Director of the Indian Education Division. (TD)

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REPORT OF THE TWENTIETH ARIZONA INDIAN TOWN HALL

"TRIBAL-STATE PARTNERSHIPS: ASSURING SUCCESS IN INDIAN EDUCATION"

Phoenix, Arizona
June 20-21, 2000

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INTRODUCTION

Arizona's Native American communities are seriously concerned about the quality of their children's education. Although Federal, state and local governments, in general, do not give education the priority that it deserves, Indian education suffers the greatest neglect.

In the past two years, tribal and community leaders have confronted the imposition of new academic standards, a proposed initiative which would mandate the implementation of English-only instruction, and the recent legislative debates over education funding.

In addition to Arizona's new standards, parents want their younger generations to learn their native language and culture. Cultural knowledge is embedded in language, and is a major factor in tribal survival.

In light of the demands of the New Economy and life in the 21st Century, Native American students should be prepared to meet life with both a firm grounding in their culture, language and traditions, and an excellent academic education. Research shows that Indian students who retain strong cultural and traditional ties to their tribes attain greater academic achievement than those who do not; therefore, it is imperative that Native American students receive both cultural and academic education.

In this context, the 20th Arizona Indian Town Hall met on June 20 and 21, 2000, to consider and discuss the vital issues of cultural and language instruction, and the impact of the new state standards, as measured by the Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) test. Nearly 100 participants, representing 17 tribes, state officials, educators, school boards, parents and students contributed their time and efforts to develop ideas and recommendations to this year's Town Hall. This is their report.

ASSURING SUCCESS IN CULTURAL AND LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

Participants agreed that tribal communities need to take proactive steps to achieve local control of cultural and language instruction in their schools. They feel that schools' current curriculum consists of math, English and sports. This curriculum neglects the vital factors that keep tribal cultures vibrant and thriving: language and culture instruction.

Therefore, Town Hall participants strongly recommend that the 21 Tribes/Nations of Arizona take the lead in determining their communities' needs. They also recommend that tribes and the state provide seed funding for programs needed to initiate and continue cultural and language instruction. Participants recommend that tribal and state funds be provided to continue these programs. This will enable local schools to develop or improve culturally and historically accurate curricula, and incorporate them into Arizona schools.

Also, it is recommended that the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) and the Arizona state government grant waivers for tribal elders and other community members to teach specific culture and/or language courses. These courses would be offered for

RC 023213

academic credit. Participants also recommend that formal accreditation be sought for tribal language and culture courses.

Another recommendation is that the state adopt an additional teaching endorsement consisting of 9-15 credit hours as part of the social studies curriculum. Teachers who are currently certified would also obtain additional training and be endorsed to teach tribal cultural history, treaties, sovereignty and current Indian law . All teachers in Arizona schools would be required to be certified in these topics.

The participants recommend that the tribes and state join together to make an assessment of current resources, best practices, and cultural/language instruction models. This assessment could be used to craft new state cultural and language instruction standards. Tribes could request partnerships with local educational resources, community colleges, the three state universities, and other higher educational institutions to develop effective models for cultural and language instruction, which could be adapted by each tribe to best facilitate this instruction.

In order to achieve more local control, Town Hall participants recommend that more tribal members run for and/or become involved in their local school boards, in order to achieve more local control. It is also recommended that parents be given more opportunities to become involved in their children's education.

Better communication is needed between school districts and local communities. Communities and school boards must engage in honest dialogue and genuine discussion, and craft agreements to enhance their children's education. Town Hall participants strongly recommend that cultural and language instruction begin in early childhood, and that families and schools be encouraged to teach their children their native languages.

Language immersion programs, such as those used in Hawaii, should be utilized to ensure that tribal children become fluent in their first language. The tribes should work together with the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) and the Arizona Legislature to develop policies ensuring that culture and language be incorporated in community schools that lack such curricula. The state universities should fund scholarships to teachers to offset the cost of cultural competency training.

Town Hall participants recognize that the importance of cultural and history instruction is not limited to Indian communities.

ASSURING SUCCESS IN ARIZONA'S INSTRUMENT TO MEASURE STANDARDS (AIMS)

Arizona Indian Town Hall participants support the new state academic standards, but recommend that the AIMS graduation requirement be delayed until 2013, when the current kindergarten class reaches high school. One participant noted that requiring students to pass a test with inadequate instruction is like 'putting the cart before the horse.' During this period, students should continue with AIMS testing, but without the high-stakes component, until tribes satisfactorily complete research into the ability of the test to accurately assess the academic achievement of Indian students.

Although many participants seek ways to aid their students to pass the test, others are strongly concerned about the very idea of a high-stakes test. Some felt that, with no funding to provide the curriculum needed to pass, along with the barriers faced by Indian students in poorly-funded schools, Indian children are being set up to fail. Participants feel that the bureaucracy that developed the test did not adequately involve tribal members in the standards discussions.

Participants are very concerned that Indian students are not sufficiently prepared to pass the test. Parents want their children to have a positive educational experience, and want to ensure that their children are not exposed to negative educational experiences, such as occurred in Indian boarding schools in the early 20th Century . Concern was voiced that the long-term effects of failure to meet the standards will have a negative impact on the self-esteem and/or future higher education potential of Indian children.

Indian Town Hall participants strongly recommend that each tribal community work with local school boards to ensure that schools teach Indian students in a culturally relevant manner and methodology. They feel that such teaching methods will give students the best possible chance to pass the state standards test. To facilitate better learning on the part of Indian students, Town Hall participants strongly recommend that students be given culturally relevant instruction and/or summer school or after-school programs. Town Hall participants also recommend that the curriculum taught in public schools be developed to meet the new state academic standards, as measured by the AIMS test.

Town Hall participants recommend that parents and students receive instruction on the standards, and that parents do not react to the standards in a crisis mode. Participants recommend that teachers also receive extra training to help them teach to the standards.

Town Hall participants also agree that both Arizona public schools and BIA schools are grossly underfunded, and that funding options do not fulfill the state government's responsibility for the education of all children . They therefore recommend that the new Arizona academic standards be used as the basis to lobby the U.S. Congress to increase funding for BIA schools, Titles V, VII , and IX , and Johnson O'Malley programs. Existing education associations, such as the Arizona Indian Education Consortium, could be utilized to help lobby Congress for extra funding. Also, Title I , which provides funds for socioeconomically disadvantaged (SED) students, is a heavily-funded program which is poorly accessed by Indian education programs. Based on ADE statistics that indicate the poor performance of Native American SED students, Title I pass-through funds need to be made more available to Indian students.

The participants note that, although the standards are set by the state, local districts should continue to determine how best to teach to these standards. Creative methodologies used by some districts to teach to the new standards could be used as models. Some of these programs are:

- Indian Honor Roll Program, Yavapai-Apache Tribe
- Dilkon Community School Newspaper
- Dilkon school library and computer classes are available in evenings

Town Hall participants strongly recommend that tribes develop their own academic standards to reflect their culture and traditions while holding to a rigorous academic standard in line with state standards. In order to ensure that tribal schools have curricula and assessments aligned with current standards, tribes should consider the development and/or enhancement of tribal education departments.

Town Hall participants feel that the standards have not been in place long enough to adequately address the problem of students who will not be able to pass the AIMS test, and prefer to address strategies to help students achieve the standards and pass the test.

Town Hall participants feel that meeting the standards needs to be a community project. Existing support programs used by other minority groups, such as Hispanics,

should be evaluated for possible adoption by Indian communities. Programs, such as the American Indian Science and Education Society (AISES), Native American Honors Program, and the Hoop of Learning, which give extra assistance and instruction to Indian high schools students, should be used as models to give students the extra instruction to help them achieve the standards. Mentorships could be utilized to aid students in learning more effectively.

The participants feel that the extended family can play a role in the improvement of academic performance and positive reinforcement by providing support to students and encouraging them to achieve high academic standards. Career Days and graduation ceremonies provide examples of opportunities parents and family members can use to show support for their children.

To obtain more support for all schools, tribal members and governments need to bring the issue of Indian students' low test scores to the attention of the Legislature, to obtain more support for all schools. Participants recommend that Native Americans be encouraged to apply for appointment to the Arizona Board of Education and other state education commissions and boards. The state should expand its efforts to recruit Indians for boards and commissions.

Many participants feel that parents are intimidated by past experiences with the education system and its attendant bureaucracy, and therefore do not feel any sense of ownership for their schools.

They also recommend that teachers and school staff become "parent friendly," and show family members respect. Teachers need to be more aware of the role that extended families play in their students' education. All schools should make use of tribal elders and other community members to enhance children's education. Parent appreciation dinners and a 'Parent of the Month' program could also reinforce parent involvement. Community members should be allowed to use school facilities for community events.

They also recommend parent workshops to encourage greater involvement in their children's education. These workshops could include education on the roles of school staff members and teachers.

In addition, Indian Town Hall participants remarked that considerably more resources are allocated to correctional facilities than to our schools. It was noted that correctional facilities are better funded than schools, and occupy state-of-the-art facilities.

Indian Town Hall participants recommend that tribes develop methods to track their tribal members through all the various educational levels (kindergarten through graduate studies).

Indian Town Hall participants recommend that tribal communities utilize student exchange programs. Participants also note that academic standards are tied to students' self-esteem.

Some programs proven to increase students' self-esteem include:

- *Fort McDowell AAA Program*--Attendance, attitude and academics achievement by students are recognized quarterly; students who perform well all year are rewarded with a trip.
- *Hopi Tribe's Head Start/Shining Star Program*--Each student is made a shining star for one week; parents participate in preparing a lesson plan for that week.
- *Rough Rock Navajo Studies Program*--students learn Navajo language and

traditional culture as part of the curriculum.
- *Dilcon Sweat Lodge Program*--students build a sweat lodge, and learn Navajo language and traditional values and culture.

Participants agree that recognizing students' achievement is paramount to academic enhancement. Some methods which schools may utilize include publishing a school paper for the community, a Hall of Fame for graduates, and a payroll deduction program to purchase home computers. Tribes could also incorporate an honor roll program. Other communities encourage and may even require students to participate in science fairs and other academic activities.

Indian Town Hall participants recommend that the state release truancy information to tribal education officials to help combat the dropout problem. Another recommendation is to initiate a joint tribal-state public relations campaign to promote educational issues.

In addition, an intertribal caucus could be developed to: (1) help the Arizona Legislature understand the issues faced by Indian children in obtaining an education, (2) educate communities on AIMS standards, and (3) encourage parental and family involvement in schools. This group could also work with ADE to facilitate and promote their existing education and public relations program.

Also, participants recommend that the tribes and state work together to develop teacher retention policies to attract and keep the best, highly-trained teachers in tribal and rural communities. These policies could include pay and other incentives tied to student performance, and/or other policies to keep teachers in tribal communities. Participants noted that, although mandated by state law, teacher housing is limited or non-existent on reservations.

The Town Hall participants recommend that the position of Director of the Indian Education Division at ADE, currently vacant, be filled and its new occupant become more visible and more active in his or her dealings with tribal student issues. It is recommended that the Arizona Commission of Indian Affairs and/or the Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona identify candidates for this position to Superintendent of Public Instruction Lisa Graham Keegan.

SUMMARY

Educating Arizona children to face the challenges of the 21st Century is of vital concern to all parents, educators, and tribal and state officials. No matter where an Indian student lives and attends school, he or she still must overcome the same barriers of inadequate funding, lack of experienced teachers, and little understanding of the unique cultures of Indian Country in order to obtain an education.

Education is a prime factor in overcoming poverty and other social ills encountered by Indian families wherever they live. Whether Native American children live in remote reservation towns or Central Phoenix, they need and deserve the finest education the citizens of Arizona can give them.

Indian people see their children as their future; tribal and cultural survival depends on Indian children learning what they need to know to become the leaders, doctors, scientists, and artists of the future. The participants of the Arizona Indian Town Hall stress that the state must do more to prepare Native American children for the future, and urge communities, parents, school boards, tribal and state governments to work closely together to ensure that Indian children achieve success in their educational goals.

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Top

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